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except that she formed the habit of appearing opportunely at critical junctures and producing the missing paper or whatever information was essential to the full performance of duty. Naturally enough, she was supposed to be in love with the lad who got the thrashing in the prelude and subsequently became Mayor, and it was not until the very last that our hero discovered inadvertently that he was the one whom she had loved all the time; and so, when we leave the paragon and the heroine, they are preparing to be married, to the satisfaction of all concerned and unconcerned.

“The Balance of Power” is a good story, despite its incongruities and the insufferable chatter of various aged gentlemen who persist in giving weak imitations of “David Harum” and “Eben Holden.” The fact that the hero is a real hero is made evident so unobtrusively that the effort in no wise impairs interest in the character. Indeed, from the very beginning we *want* him to be a paragon. We should be disappointed if he were else in any respect. He wins and holds our sympathy. At no step do we have the slightest doubt of his ultimate triumph; but, instinctively, we wish to behold his success and in a certain sense participate in it. It is the human’s inherent regard for strength and simplicity, and the conviction that those two qualities constitute the basis of impregnability, that bear one gladly along such a triumphal progress, however unreal it may seem in some of its aspects, however commonplace the environment and however ordinary the realism, so long as it be, as in this case, so well drawn as to make even the minor characters truly live. The key-note of the book is homely idealism, and it is uplifting. All that was required to make it a strong story, instead of a story of a strong man, was the service of an editor capable of eliminating superfluous verbiage, dovetailing incidents and interlacing the threads in such a manner that the narrative might have run along, if not altogether smoothly, at least without a surfeit of interruption.

THE EDITOR.

“LORDS AND LOVERS, AND OTHER DRAMAS.”*

A NEW poet! Is it not something to say in these days of political alarms and the apotheosis of the commonplace in art and lit-

* “Lords and Lovers, and Other Dramas.” By Olive Tilford Dargan.
New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

erature? Yet, indubitably a poet of charm and power has appeared in the person of Olive Tilford Dargan, a Southern woman whose dramas, "Lords and Lovers," are put forth by Charles Scribner's Sons. Now the obvious thing when a new poet is announced, patterning after Hazlitt, is to take down from the shelf an old and tested one. In the case of Mrs. Dargan I followed this advice not literally, but out of sheer curiosity; when I saw her name I recalled an earlier performance of hers, and promptly found it: "Semiramis, and Other Plays" is its title (Brentano's). Published only two years ago, the territory—emotional, intellectual and technical—that this author has traversed since then is remarkable. I am tempted to add that the three earlier dramas must be the work of a decade ago—one in particular is painfully amateurish; it is called "The Poet," in which Edgar Allan Poe is galvanized into something terrific, unnatural and bombastic. "Carlotta" is better. It is the story of the unhappy wife of Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico. Yet, despite passages of eloquence there is much confusion, formal as well as in the characterization. "Semiramis" is full of excellent material; it is rather operatic, but there is no denying the climacteric force in several scenes. The verse is flowing and felicitous. Fancy coming upon an admirable picture like this in the work of an unknown poet!

"But suddenly
A missile struck your helmet and dislodged
The glory of your face before my eyes,
Your hair ran gold, the shining East looked black
Behind the star you made upon its breast!"

It is as rich as a rich chord of Marlowe's.

The later volume comprises three dramas: "Lords and Lovers," "The Shepherd," and "The Siege." The first is a play in two parts, the scenes laid in England at the time of Henry III. Mrs. Dargan has woven a romantic double drama and in the terms of the theatre. It is dangerous to predicate the acting qualities of a book play, of a so-called "closet drama"; yet, aside from too many copious speeches the action is swift, incident is linked to incident with an unfailing sense of the technical necessities, while the curve described in both pieces is logical in characterization, orderly in development. Too often the elaborate stateliness of the

diction detracts the attention from the flight of the tale; but it is a tale and it is well told, a rare quality in any writer. With all her command of assonance, her fluidity of phrase, the author has a concern for structure as well as style.

Regarding the genesis of this particular play—indeed, of the key-note to all her plays—it is in her favor when we say that Mrs. Dargan must have saturated her imagination in Elizabethan literature; above all, have swum in the larger seas of Shakespeare. She sounds, though faintly, the same order of music. So well has she assimilated the diction of this period that it has become second nature for her to prodigally shower upon her pages its images. And an image-maker, above all else, is this poet. Her vocabulary is varied, glowing, expressive; she moves freely within the gyves of blank verse. Her rhythms have a graceful motion; they never descend to sluggish grandiloquence, nor can her lines be mistaken for prose in mechanical metric arrangement. It is good blank verse, good because, in idea and execution, it is poetic. Mr. Bernard Shaw once wrote an amusing play in blank verse to show how easy the form could be handled. He succeeded, without being a poet. It is the fatal easiness of it all for facile talent that has made the form a thing to be shunned. Yet here is Mrs. Dargan speaking it as her mother tongue and winning our ears by the supple, picturesque and finely fibred music she extorts from her instrument.

There are rough spots and windy spaces scattered through her pages; several of her characters are intolerable rhetoricians. However, the average maintained is a high one; the verse is well knit without displaying metallic precision, the enjambement neat, the flow always in modulation, though there is at times undue syllabic stress. Nor is it necessary to cry aloud the sex of the writer; she has a sense of dynamics that is almost masculine, coupled with dramatic imagination, the evocative power, the exposing in natural sequence the souls of her characters. When we credit a poet with imagination, with the gift of musical speech and the faculty of projecting upon the dramatic canvas the images of men and women and their loves, hates and sorrows, we are putting praise at a high notch. Add to these a literary quality and one may fairly claim the title of a new poet. Mrs. Dargan is a poet; not a great one, because not original, though she is decidedly individual. And, unfortunately, she has

a weakness for "happy endings" which betrays the feminine rift in her lute.

Her characters speak Shakespeare; and excellent Shakespeare it is. Modelled in the grand Elizabethan mould, the men have the right virile ring, the women are either monsters like the Macbethian Eleanor or the Perdita-like Glaia. This Glaia is an exquisite creation. The ward of the Earl of Kent, she is loved by the ardent, youthful Henry III of England. The love scenes are fresh and stirring. Henry is here a poet of ecstasy. Hear how he challenges a mighty poet:

"Hark! Now the lark has met the clouds,
And raises his sheer melodious flood;
The green earth casts her mystic shrouds
To meet the flaming god!"

Mrs. Dargan is first a lyric poet; her lyricism suffuses her every page. She can pen a rattling catch like this—and the kinship of the lines is really a matter of congratulation rather than of critical condemnation:

"When Hobnail's store is ripe for raids,
And grapes go to the pressing,
And apple cheeks are like a maid's
When Jacks would be a-kissing."

The theme being "Ho, Autumn-time, O, Autumn-time." Or take this quatrain in "The Siege" with its delicious Herrick-like strains:

"Her voice is like the birds that wive
When blossoms swing in April trees,
And from her bosom's honey hive
Sighs come and go like bees."

There is hardly a page of the volume from which some mellow conceit, some melodic jewel, informed with the crossed-fires of a singularly opulent imagination, cannot be culled. Her prose as spoken by the minor personages is as it should be, though the wit is too suggestive of a phase of humor happily long extinct. In "The Siege" Mrs. Dargan transports us to the Sicily of Dionysius the tyrant of Syracuse. The architectonic of this five-act drama is mediocre. Vivid, tropical, though banal in its ending, it is a play that could never be put before the footlights. Aristocles, the protagonist, does not win our sympathies, for he deluges us with talk, gorgeous talk, but only too superfluous.

The tyrant is the best-drawn character; the women are rather colorless. The entire play is as brilliantly violent as Webster or Cyril Tourneur.

"The Shepherd" is the one prose drama in the book. Here again is the poet's versatility exhibited. She knows Russia, modern Russia, as well as she divined the No Man's Land of poetic England, Italy and Assyria. The play is moving, a story of nihilism, mad love, and the extravagant love of humanity, the ingredients, in a word, that are to be found in the romantic, unhappy Russia of the social revolution. There is a Robert Browning atmosphere, not in diction, nor yet in form; the quality of robust optimism and wholesome revolt—the young violinist Vasil has a touch of Sordello idealism in him—are of Browning. Mrs. Dargan has read the English poet without making any mocking-bird attempts to recapture his rapture. She is mistress of her own moods, and they are authentic ones. And may one venture to ask why, with her command of the apparatus of drama, she does not give us a viable modern play—not necessarily of the problem type, as if all good drama did not enshrine a problem!—and be satisfied with her conquests in the domain of the distinguished dead? This question is an ungrateful one, after a poet has proved that she possesses both voice and vision. But lyrical and blank verse exercises in the Elizabethan dramatic form are not the pabulum of our times. Mrs. Dargan can, if she will, write a drama of contemporaneous interest. It need be neither as pessimistic as Ibsen, nor as symbolic as Maeterlinck. She has the poet's greatest gift with his music, human sympathy, and that she can touch with delicacy and force modern themes is demonstrated by "The Shepherd." There she rises to a generous indignation that promises well for the future.

Among the late comers to our Parnassus we have William Vaughn Moody, poet and mystic, and like all true mystics, a realist in the conduct of quotidian life. He has actually written a popular play, "The Great Divide," he the Fire-Bringer! And there is that youthful prodigy, George Sylvester Viereck, the bilingual German-American poet, whose imaginative verse is shot through with the splendors of Heine, Swinburne and Keats; and to these names we must now add that of Olive Tilford Dargan, veritably a new poet.

JAMES HUNEKER.